

## A Message from the Executive Director

The Holiday Season is here and 2016 is right around the corner. It is amazing how fast the year has passed. I recommend that everyone take some time off to share with their families during this special time of the year. The holidays fall on Friday this year and we greatly appreciate Governor Bryant authorizing extra days so we can enjoy two four-day weekends. Ole Miss, State, USM and ASU will all be participating in Bowl Games over the holiday season. There is so much to be thankful for as we enter the new year with new hopes and aspirations.

Please do not forget the less fortunate during this time of year. In addition to our annual fund drive for the United Way, MDHS is in a unique position to involve the community to be sure that the elderly, kids in foster care and others in need receive holiday gifts and meals. I deeply appreciate the generosity of the employees for your contributions to the Oakley Christmas Fund. It has to be extremely painful for these young people to be away from their homes and families during the Christmas season. Your contributions make it possible for them to have a special day and lessen the anxiety that they are experiencing.

The Public Catalyst Report has been released and is available for review on the MDHS website. No were no surprises in the report. It is, in my opinion, thorough

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## Handle with Care: Train the Trainer



In county offices and the State Office, our MDHS staff interact with clients and the public every day. Services vary from recertification for benefits to elder abuse prevention or removal of children from unsafe environments. To ensure that these events are handled appropriately, professionally and safely for all involved, the agency is providing training to help staff protect clients and themselves and learn to de-escalate any potentially volatile situations.

Handle With Care is a behavior management training program offering verbal de-escalation, personal defense, passive holding (restraint) and instructor training. HWC has been a leader in the field of crisis intervention, behavior management and restraint for more than two decades. Their training model is considered the "standard of best practices" in behavior management and safe physical intervention, and is taught throughout the entire spectrum of the human services environment and schools.

HWC has trained 24 MDHS employees who will then make

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Distributed by the  
Mississippi Department of  
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and fair. I am excited to have this part of the process behind us and look forward to moving on to next step. The teen pregnancy and infant mortality rates recently issued by the Mississippi Department of Health show dramatic improvement. All agencies, political parties, communities and the private sector must unite to continue to improve the plight of children in Mississippi.

Although much has been accomplished, there remains much to be done. We all are in this together. The future of our state depends on how well nourish, protect, educate and provide a healthy environment for our children. Regardless of how this plays out over the coming years, a separate state agency or whatever the structure may be, the mission remains the same. We are all part of the solution and must never lose focus.

Governor Bryant announced December 7, 2015, that Mississippi Supreme Justice David Chandler will be leaving his current position to become the new director of Family and Children's Services. We have posted a copy of his biography from the Supreme Court to the MDHS website. It is too early to address other issues regarding F&CS. Speculation and rumor only create confusion and anxiety. I can say unequivocally that Governor Bryant has selected a person of high integrity for this important position. I look forward to working with him to make his transition into MDHS/F&CS as smooth as possible.

The new federal fiscal year actually started in October. We are off to a fast start, picking up where we left off last year. Everyone needs to remain committed to their tasks. I will provide information in future issues of the BEACON or issue Statements From the Executive Director if warranted to ensure that you are informed.

Everyone have a great new year!

Rickey Berry  
MDHS Executive Director

up training teams of two instructors each. The goal is to have enough instructor teams to train all MDHS personnel efficiently without placing a burden on instructors or staff.

Instructor teams will train MDHS personnel beginning with those most "at risk." Two-day training classes will be scheduled around the state and personnel will be encouraged to participate, working around their normal day-to-day duties.

HWC is dedicated to the reduction of violence through:

- Tension reduction.
- Staff use of preventative actions that result in a decrease of a need for use of physical intervention.
- The use of prompt skillful and appropriate intervention when physical restraint is necessary, in order to minimize injuries to clients, children and staff.
- Creating a universal perception of physical and psychological safety in the milieu.

All verbal and physical interventions operate from these assumptions:

- There is no dignity in allowing a child or adult to hurt himself or someone else.
- He needs to be protected from the physical and emotional consequences of his behavior.
- We need to be protected from the physical and emotional consequences of his behavior.
- In order to act in his best interest, we need to be in control of our own feelings and behavior.
- He is aware at some level that he is out of control and expects us to demonstrate the capacity to help bring him under control safely.
- A person in crisis will know the difference between something done for him and something done to him ONLY if we are clear about it first.
- The skillful application of physical restraint is a critical extension of the therapeutic relationship.

For more information, contact MDHS Emergency Management Coordinator Alynda Ponder at 601-359-2616 or 601-832-0030.



# The Beacon

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## Many happy families after judge holds Adoption Day

Monday, Nov. 23, was a good day for the Nicholas Welch family. Their family of four became a family of five. "We're feeling good," Welch said. "We're pumped up about this."

Welch's family participated in a mass adoption ceremony in 10th District Chancery Court in Hattiesburg. Welch and his wife adopted 2-year-old Browyn, a foster child who had been living in their home.

Welch said the family had been waiting for this day to come.

"It was a long time," he said. "We understand it taking so long, but we've had him since birth."

It was standing room only in the courtroom, with the families of 25 to 30 foster children waiting to adopt them into their forever homes.

Judge Dawn Beam could barely be heard over the chatter coming from excited children, as she said, "This is a happy day. We're glad you are here." The children waiting to be adopted had all been wards of the state. Beam invited their social workers to come forward as the adoptions proceeded.

Melynda and Max Mosley were adopting their four grandchildren, ranging in age from 6 to 9.

Beam gave a little bit of a prodding from her judge's bench. "You may have obeyed in the past, but now you really have to obey," she told the children.

The Mosleys had also been waiting a long time to adopt, after their daughter could not take care of her children.

"It's exciting," Melynda Mosley, 54, said. "It's the end of a long road. They've been in the system for six years. We're very happy. We've got some big things to be thankful for."

Nine-year-old Johnny was also feeling happy. "It's good," he said. "The adoption is final."

November is National Adoption Month. In addition to Beam, several judges around the state this month finalized a large group of adoptions with a ceremony and celebration.

Single mother Louise Thorpe, 53, adopted 5-year-old Terbarous, who will go home to his 2-year-old sister. She has been caring for the disabled youngster for more than three years — ever since she picked him up from the hospital where he was being treated for medical neglect.

"I loved him when I first got him home from the hospital," Thorpe said. "(I thought) if he ever came up for adoption I would love to have him."

Caseworker Rhoncia Clark said Thorpe was there when she was needed. "Marion County DHS contacted us, and we happened to have Ms. Thorpe to take on a total medical child," she said. "She was up for the challenge."

Beam said there is a tremendous need for foster care.

"Many adopting parents begin as foster parents," Beam said in a news release. "There is a real need for residents to volunteer to be foster parents to care for these children."

"In those unfortunate cases where parents are unable to change their behavior and offer a stable environment, adoptive homes are needed to give permanency to our children."

Beam said Mass Adoption Day was full of miracles in the spirit of the holiday season.

"Thanksgiving is right around the corner and Christmas," she said. "Can you imagine not having a family to spend the holidays with? Adoption is about family. It's about that assurance that you have folks that love you through thick and thin."

*Ellen Ciurczak Hattiesburg American staff writer, reprint from the Hattiesburg American <http://hatne.ws/1jhTtxX>*

## Region 4-N Permanency Celebration Conference



*Mechille Henry, Region 4-N ASWS and Attorney Crystal Welch, MC Law Adoption Legal Clinic.*

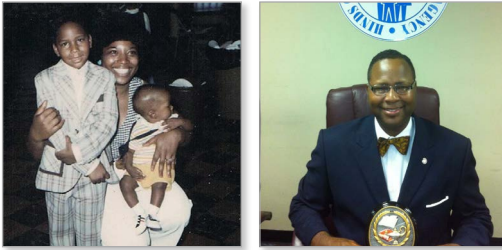
In recognition of National Adoption Month, Region 4-N held a conference to celebrate children and families who have obtained permanency through adoption. The Permanency Celebration Conference was held Nov. 7 at the First Baptist Church Warehouse Outreach Center in Starkville. Guest speaker for the event was Crystal Welch, an attorney with the Mississippi College School of Law, Adoption Legal Clinic.

Conference sessions provided information on how to assess and utilize online training resources for resource home licensure, resource home licensure qualifications, available respite opportunities and foster parenting resources.

Special thanks to First Baptist Church of Starkville; Nathan Taylor; Oby's Sandwiches; Southern Christian Services for Children & Youth; Marlon Thomas; Emerson Family Resource Center; Elmarie Brooks; Oktibbeha County Family & Children's Services; Angela Nichols; Mississippi State University, Social Work student volunteers; Jada Johnson; the resource and adoptive families; volunteers and staff.



## Employee Recognizes Value in Early Education



*Sherman Nunn, as a child at his graduation from Head Start with his teacher, Ms. Pleasure, and her newborn baby. Hinds County Head Start Policy Council recognized Sherman for his work to ensure children have access to quality early education.*

This year marks 50 years since the creation of Head Start, a national commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty by providing at-risk children and their families comprehensive early learning programs. I am a proud Head Start alumnus, and if ever a tale can be told about the meaningful and transformative power of a program designed to give vulnerable children a head start in the race toward the future, my story is it.

I was raised by my mother and grandmother, two strong women with a reverence for education, who, despite struggling to make ends meet, did everything they could to ensure I entered the education system as early as possible. The greatest impact Head Start had on my mother and grandmother was providing a safe, productive environment for me to be in while they both worked. My mother would often volunteer time to help, especially with holiday events. She and I reminisce on those days and she often mentions that such experiences helped her out of her shell, inspiring her to become a more engaged member of her community.

Head Start gave me, among so many other things, a platform to express myself. It was the place that I first realized my own gift of being a communicator. I can honestly say that the roots of my professional conquests were highly influenced by my earliest days of development in Head Start, which led me to work in radio and television, as well as public relations. Head Start reinforced many of the values that I learned at home, which lead not only to social development skills, but also shaped my more inwardly directed development. Amidst all of the clay, crayons and building blocks was the very foundation of who I would become as an adult.

Head Start put me on the path to succeeding in school and going on to make a contribution to my community. Today, I serve as the Chairman of the Hinds County Head Start Policy Council, where we work to ensure vulnerable Mississippi children are given the same window of opportunity I was given.

Head Start's unique two-generation approach to early learning is putting families across the country back on the path to success.

So, Happy 50th Birthday Head Start. Thank you for changing my mother's life and laying my foundation for a bright future.

*Article submitted by Sherman Nunn, DECCD.*

## PI Weapons Recertification

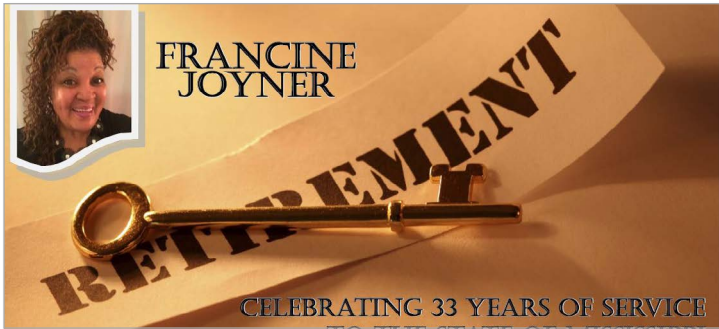


Each year, Program Integrity takes to the classroom and firing range to renew their firearms certification, and improve and refresh their skills. This year, Josh Keogel and Robert Jackson taught investigators weapons retention, quick reaction drills, weapon techniques and verbal judo during classroom session. After lunch, they met at the Jackson Police Department Firing Range and shot two qualification sessions. The first session was "Grouping of Shots" which is a pass or fail qualification. Investigators have to score 40 hits out of 50 shots. The second session is the State of Mississippi Minimum Standards qualification. All of our MDHS investigators met full qualification.

Of note, you may have noticed that some investigators now openly carry their firearms in the office during business hours. This is provided as an extra layer of security for the State Office, county offices, staff and clients. We appreciate our PI team for all they do!



## Retirements



The State Office and the Division of Family & Children's Services will miss Francine Joyner who served the state for 33 years with her warm smile and friendly spirit. She retires to enjoy more time with her family, specifically her mom. We wish Francine well. Congratulations on your years of service.

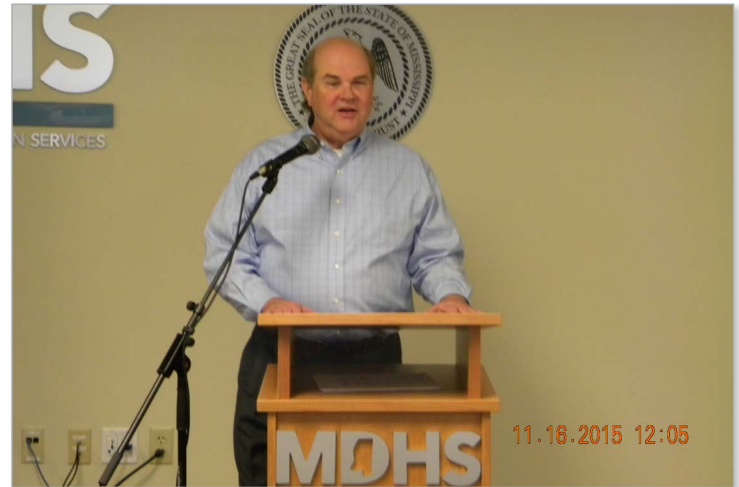


Smith County Clerk Typist Senior Cindy Bass retired Oct. 15 with 27.25 years of service with DFCS and Child Support. A reception was held at Berry's Restaurant in Magee and included staff, guests and family. From left, Smith County ASWS Georgia McCullum; Cindy Bass; Region 5-E ASWS Alethea Owens Cook; and Homemaker Mae Gavin.



Alfreda Moody retired from MDHS November 16, with 21 years of service. For the past eight years, Alfreda worked in the Division of Aging and Adult Services, Adult Protective Services program as the Area Social Work Supervisor for Regions 1 and 2. Congratulations, Alfreda! We wish you the best!

## United Way Kick-Off



November 16 was the kick-off for our annual United Way Fundraising Campaign. Our agency goal this year is to raise \$10,000 for United Way! We can do this with everyone's support and participation.

The United Way of the Capital Area is a nonprofit organization that serves Hinds, Madison and Rankin Counties in the areas of education, income and health to help our families and our communities thrive.

Funding for these programs is primarily provided by individual donors and corporate gifts. MDHS has supported their efforts through an annual campaign for a number of years.

There are many ways to help the United Way including payroll deduction and online giving. If you choose to go online for your donation, please provide a copy of the confirmation to Sandra Herring so that your gift can be included in the campaign total. Support the agency's effort to give back to our communities.

Contact Sandra Herring, Training & Staff Development Supervisor at 601-359-4394 or email [sandra.herring@mdhs.ms.gov](mailto:sandra.herring@mdhs.ms.gov) for additional information.

Of note, if everyone at the State Office donated \$25, we would quickly reach our goal. Those who choose payroll deduction, can have as little as \$1 per pay period to go toward this campaign.

No amount is too great or too small and pledges will be accepted until Dec. 31, 2015.

Online Donations:

<http://www.myunitedway.com/campaign-resources/give-to-the-united-way/>

United Way Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7PMomZWZpw>



## DFO Training



The State Office recently welcomed child support enforcement officers and eligibility workers from across the state to Jackson for training. These frontline employees represent the "face of MDHS" to Mississippi residents who come to county offices for assistance. We appreciate the division's diligent work to train and maintain quality staff.

## Fall Health Fair a Success



The annual State Office Fall Health Fair was held Wednesday, Nov. 4 in the Training Room. The vendors were Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi, Armstrong/King Chiropractor, Active Health Management, UMMC Tobacco Treatment (ACT), Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, Merit Health New Vision, Gastroenterology Associates, MEA, Hinds Co. Extension MS State University, NAMI, Skinny's Nutrition Studio, YMCA, Sam's Club, Liberty Hearing, and the Mississippi State Treasury.

More than 149 employees attended the event and were able to get on-the-spot vision screenings, flu shots and important health and fitness information.

We appreciate the efforts of the Health Council who organized the event. From left: Harold Broome, Gail Smith, Temcula Robinson, Chris Cavett, and Carol Girod. Also, not pictured, Renfred Tate and Christopher Ray.



## Did you know...

Our agency newsletter has been called *The Beacon* ever since July of 2003. There was a contest held to gather suggestions for a new name for monthly events paper and a \$50 Savings Bond was offered for the prize winning entry. The winner, Mike Bullard, current Director of IT Security, won the contest. His entry and subsequent remarks on the new name are as appropriate now as they were then. His name for the newsletter, *The BEACON*, was developed as an acronym which stands for "**B**ecause **E**veryone at MDHS is **A**ttuned to **C**aring for **O**thers **N**aturally."

Mike commented at the time that the thing he enjoys most about working at MDHS is the caring nature of all the employees and the wonderful mission the agency serves for the great State of Mississippi. "I believe that MDHS touches the lives of people in need every day. That is what I considered when thinking about a title for the MDHS newsletter."

Mike and more than 3,800 others feel the same way. A caring community of coworkers who serve Mississippians every day. Our thanks go out to Mike who more than 12 years ago recognized the heart of MDHS and shared it with all of us.

## DCS Implementation Workshop Held



*At the annual DCS conference, PRVO was awarded the 2015 Most Innovative Service Project. From left, PRVO Program Manager Doneater Mack, PRVO Executive Director Helmon Johnson and DCS Deputy Director Nicole McBeath.*

In November, the Division of Community Services, in conjunction with the Mississippi Association of Community Action Agencies, held its annual Implementation Workshop at the Hilton of Jackson. This year's theme was, "Community Action 101: Service, Self-Sufficiency and Succession." All 20 Community Action Agencies throughout the state were in attendance.

The workshop included sessions for case workers and case managers, executive directors of local CAA agencies, fiscal staff, Weatherization staff and EITC coordinators.

Jennie Chaffin, director of the Office of Community Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families was the opening speaker. A special highlight of the conference was a group from the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians who provided a special presentation in traditional tribal clothing. Lorraine Daniels provided greetings and Sheknita Davis served as the keynote speaker. Along with the host of great information that was provided during the week, awards were presented.

- Most Innovative Service Project: Pearl River Valley Opportunity, Inc. (see above photo).
- EITC Award, 2014 Tax Year: Jackson County CAC, Inc., (see photo below).
- 2015 CAA Outstanding Fiscal Worker: Multi-County CSA, Inc., Fiscal Director Shaketa Hosey and DCS Fiscal Director Lillie Smith.
- 2015 CAA Outstanding Caseworker: Jackson County CAC, Inc. Felicia Downs and DCS Virtual ROMA Team member Verkista White.
- 2015 DCS Outstanding Employee: DCS Contract Unit Alicia Jackson.



## Looks like Autumn in the Delta



Panola County Director Arlene Wilson recently sent this photo of her staff who shared a luncheon in celebration of the change in seasons.

## Holidays in Mississippi

For many of us, the holidays bring families together to enjoy fellowship and food. The holiday season also gives us an opportunity to get out and enjoy some of the local traditions around the state. I hope this season of thankfulness, hope and giving is a blessed time for you all. Below are just a sampling of local events.



**Christmas in Cotton Plant.** Located north of New Albany on Highway 15 at the Union/Tippah county line. Features over 500 inflatables, synchronized lights and music and choirs for the season. <http://christmasincottonplant.com/>

**17th Annual Southern Lights**, 7651 Tchulahoma Road, Southaven. A 116-acre park with twinkling lights and displays. Tune your car radio to one of several streaming FM stations and enjoy the ride.

**Natchez Christmas Market**, located on South Broadway in Natchez on the bluff. Vendors include local artisans selling holiday themed goods. <http://www.visitnatchez.org/>

**Christmas in the Park**, Crystal Springs hosts a winter wonderland filled with displays and lights sure to please. Open Thursday through Sunday evenings from 5-9 p.m. until Dec. 25.

**Victorian Christmas, the City of Lights**, Canton. This annual attraction centers around the historic town square and offers a Merchant's Open House, trolley rides, exhibits and parades. <http://www.cantontourism.com/christmas.html/>

Be sure to read or watch your local news for parades and other holiday events for you and your family to enjoy.